

SWEDEN Customs and Traditions

or Sweden 101

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The size of Sweden

>8.9 million inhabitants occupy the fourth largest country in Europe.
If you
>were to swing Sweden round at 180° using the southernmost tip as
the axis,
>you could reach central Italy no problem. Mind you, the Sami
(Laplanders)
>would want to know what they were suddenly doing in Naples.
travel by
>sleeper. This means that not many Swedes know what their country
looks like.
>They either fly 10 000 metres above it or sleep through it.

Geography



>

>The southern part of Sweden is the most densely populated and is inhabited

>by people called Scanians, a kind of Swedish-speaking Dane. They are proud

>to tell you that they were once a part of Denmark and that they have

>absolutely nothing in common with the rest of the country. Indeed they are

>geographically closer to Berlin than to Stockholm. The southern part of

>Sweden is the gateway to Europe and the rest of the world. Or at least to

>Copenhagen for a good night out.

>The north of Sweden is inhabited by northerners (Norrlänningar) and the Sami

>(Laplanders), an ancient hunting and fishing nomadic people who live in

>tents and speak a Finno-Urgic language they themselves can hardly

>understand. This is perhaps why they hardly say anything at all.
 Norrland,
 >as this area is called, stretches across 60% of Sweden and is so
 sparsely
 >populated that the inhabitants hardly ever meet anyone to talk to.
 >
 >In central Sweden lies the capital, Stockholm. Stockholm is
 inhabited by
 >'zero eights', so called because of their telephone area codes. 'Zero
 >eights' have a reputation for being like sea-gulls, they scream and
 cause a
 >mess wherever they go. Well, that's what the Swedish-speaking
 Danes say in
 >the south. The people of the north haven't said a word. As usual.



The Swedish summer

>
 >The Swedish summer is the warmest day of the year. And as Sweden
 is a very
 >normal country, it is normal for the Swedish summer to be a bit
 colder than
 >normal.

The Swedish winter

>
 >The geography book will tell you that, although the country is on the
 ame
 >latitude as Alaska, Sweden has a mild climate and the tlantic Gulf
 stream
 >gives warm winters. The truth is that there are wo types of winter in
 >Sweden. A grey one and a white one. Swedes survive the winter only
 by
 >dreaming of what they are going to do on that summer's day.

Sweden - a peace-loving nation

>
 >Sweden is a peace-loving country. There is, after all, such a thing as
 the

>Nobel Peace Prize. Having invented dynamite, gelignite and nitroglycerine,
>and other substances enough to blow the earth out of the solar system, the
>Swede Alfred Nobel got a guilty conscience and used his profits to set up
>the Nobel Foundation.
>
>The Swedes are neutral because they say they are. They are the conscience of
>the world and therefore only sell peaceful weapons. Preferably to be used as
>fireworks.

>**Europa!**

>For most Swedes Europe starts on the other side of the Sound in Copenhagen.
>Sweden joined the EU in 1995, although most of them would have preferred the
>EU to join Sweden on their terms. 99% of the Swedes are now soberly against
>the EU as it is no longer possible to buy tax-free spirits and cigarettes
>when travelling from one EU country to another. For, up to now, it has
>always been the duty of every Swede to buy his ration both on the way out
>and on the way back. Once at a hotel in one of Europe's exciting
>metropolises, Swedes used to gather, lock themselves up in the room and
>drink duty-free booze out of the toothbrush glass. The fact that bar prices
>in Europe are usually considerably lower than even Swedish tax-free prices
>never occurred to them.

> >**Scandinavian neighbors**

>
>As Victor Borge, the Danish entertainer, once said. Some things are better
>in Sweden than in Denmark. The Swedes have better neighbors.
>
>Norway is very sparsely inhabited and has an average of three inhabitants per

>mountain. Norway always regarded itself as the little brother of Sweden
>until someone pointed out that if you flattened all the mountains, the country would be fifty times larger than its big brother. That and earning
>zillions of crowns from North Sea oil has done wonders to raise Norwegian
>self-esteem.

>

> **Swedish politics**

>

>Swedes are liberal, yet they always vote for the social democrats.

That's

>because they are so conservative. Or, as the well-known saying goes, the

>Swedes are a colorful people. They think blue, vote red and eat green.

>

> **Swedish tax**

>

>Governments in Sweden have spent years convincing Swedes that their money

>isn't really their own. But the Swede is a person of great initiative and

>has developed a few ways of keeping a few crowns for himself.

Nobody is

>allowed to get rich. If people in other countries see someone drive round in

>a flashy sports car, they may exclaim 'Wow! What a cool guy!' In Sweden

>they'll say 'What a tax-dodger'.

>

>Business climate in Sweden

>

>In the USA business people go to their therapist's after a nervous

>breakdown. In Sweden people running their own businesses go to their

>accountant's.

>

> **Swedish business culture**

>

>Swedish managers want to be normal people and one of the team.

That is why

>they like to be called by their first names; Bengan, Maggan, Bosse and Kalle

- >by their staff. They never shut their office door and they even queue up in
- >the same canteen as the workers and eat the same food. They like to think of
- >themselves more as a coach than a commander. Swedish management delegates
- >responsibility and authority throughout the organization. Over 80% of Swedes
- >have some form of vocational training and staff are therefore quite capable
- >of taking initiative and participating in the decision-making. For
- >foreigners it's sometimes difficult to know who's in charge around here.
- >Lasse in his open-necked, short-sleeved, yellow shirt and white socks and
- >sneakers, doesn't really look the part.

>

> **Swedish inventions**

>

- >Sweden gave the world ball-bearings, safety matches, adjustable wrenches,
- >safety belts, Tetra Paks, Volvo and Saab. It also makes and exports Absolut
- >vodka, which is rather ironic as the Swedish word for teetotalers is
- >'Absolutist'. Ikea, of course, is also Swedish. If the social democrats
- >created the welfare state, commonly referred to as 'the home of the people',
- >then Ikea furnished it.

>

> **Swedish schedules**

>

- >The Bible of the modern Swede is his filofax. Everything he has to do for
- >the next six months is meticulously written down. Take kids to day care,
- >drop of suit for cleaning, ring dentist, meeting with sales team, fax
- >figures, lunch with Bengan, meeting, pick up car, drive home, take off
- >shoes, shout at kids. It's all in there - every movement. All planned and
- >organised down to the very last minute. If a Swede misplaces his filofax
- >then he loses direction in life - he simply does not know what to do next.

>

>Everything is planned weeks in advance and written down next to the times it
>has to be performed. Flexibility is not the name of the game here. Once
>written in, then thy will be done. Swedes are impressed by filofaxes which
>are full and overflowing. A chock-a-block filofax is a status symbol. The
>next time you want to arrange a meeting with a Swede, watch how he
>instinctively reaches for his filofax, opens it in January and flicks
>through week after week, month after month of crammed appointments finally
>to stop in October some time. Then something will happen. Your Swedish
>business partner will mutter something like 'Is week 37 OK? I can squeeze
>you in in week 38'. Swedes count weeks. Each week has a number. Ask the
>average Swede when week 29 is and he hasn't got a clue. But that gives him
>another excuse to reach for his filofax and start flicking through.
>
>He'll find that it's in July, in the middle of his holiday and therefore he
>couldn't care less what the number of the week is.
>
>000101
>
>Swedes write the date backwards. Year first, then month and then day. Nobody
>says the date that way, but Swedes are sure it's the right way to write it.
>Everybody has a national registration number with ten digits based on the
>date of their birth and a few extra ones, such as 581023-6879. Or as one
>Swede put it "It's the day, month and year when you were born backwards and
>then followed by four figures". Childbirth is a painful business in Sweden.
>
>**The Social Swede**
>
>**Swedish homes**
>

>These are usually very tasteful, yet simply furnished. Swedish homes are
>simple, clean and uncluttered. Foreign guests very often ask 'How nice. When
>are you moving in?' Swedes have good taste in furniture and home-decorating.
>Walls are usually painted in a plain colour and the sofa, the carpets, and
>the curtains all match. Indeed, when they entertain at home, even the
>candles match the curtains, which match the table cloth which matches the
>serviettes which often match the hostess's dress.

>

>**Invited to dinner - 1**

>

>They take the paper off a bunch of flowers before they ring the doorbell of
>their hosts for the evening. It's rather like unwrapping a Christmas present
>before you give it to someone. Nobody ever knows where to put the paper once
>they've screwed it up. Usually the hostess end up taking it. A bunch of
>pretty flowers in one hand and a soggy, screwed up piece of wrapping paper
>in the other.

>

>**Invited to dinner - 2**

>

>The person sitting next to you at the dinner table will offer you a lump of
>butter on a wooden knife. It is not some ancient superstitious Viking ritual
>whereby the knife has to be passed once round the table. It's quite simply
>the height of politeness to offer your neighbor some butter on a knife. What
>you do if there's not enough butter on the knife or if there is some left
>over, goodness knows. But there's no need to pass it on to the next person
>as he's busy handing butter to someone else.

>

>**Invited to dinner - 3**

>

>Swedes are very polite guests. They show much appreciation for the food.

>They guess the ingredients, enquire how it was cooked, wonder where the

>ingredients were bought and ask how long it needed in the oven. In fact,

>most guests ask for the recipe and this is the greatest of compliments. They

>eat and mutter 'This was good' which is rather strange as they are still

>eating it.

>

>**At the restaurant - 1**

>

>You are forced to hang up your coat when entering a restaurant as it is

>infested with all sorts of harmful bacteria. For this pleasure you are

>expected to pay. Why should you pay? To pay the cloakroom attendant. Why

>have a cloakroom attendant? If they didn't there'd be no-one to take your 15

>crowns. Get it?

>

>**At the restaurant - 2**

>

>Swedes believe in fairness. No-one should be in debt to anyone else.

>Consequently they insist on all paying their fair share at the restaurant

>when the bill comes. Who had what and how much takes forever to work out and

>is not made easier by the fact that nobody at that stage has a clear head.

>Lengthy calculations on a serviette and countless restarts later, they've

>worked out how much each person owes down to the last krona. This is when

>several in the group realize they need to take out an instant bank loan.

>

>**Swedish alcohol policy**

>

>The Swedes do have an alcohol problem. It's so expensive that no-one can

>afford it. How can anyone afford to get drunk, let alone become an

>alcoholic? The 'Systembolaget' (the system company) is the national retail

>monopoly which displays wine and beer behind locked glass cases. If you
>really must buy the horrid stronger stuff, then it's safely stacked away on
>shelves behind the counter. No wonder Swedes think it's an exciting
>adventure to go into a bright, open, welcoming tax-free shop at the airport
>where they are trusted to pick up a bottle of booze and not drink it before
>reaching the check-out.

>

>**Wine**

>

>How do you ask for something if you can't pronounce it? To help Swedes get
>their tongues around strange foreign names once they reach the counter, the
>Systembolaget's brochure used to contain the phonetic pronunciation of all
>the wines on sale. Coteaux de Langedoc became something like kåta de
>långödock which doesn't look at all drinkable. Today, as fully fledged
>members of the EU and therefore full-blooded Europeans, Swedes have to
>manage without this customer-friendly linguistic help. Mind you, if you ask
>for a Californian wine in fluent English, the chances are the assistant
>won't understand. They need a Swedish accent.

>

>**Beer**

>

>Beer in Sweden is classified into four types according to alcohol content.
>This is perhaps best explained by a Swedish business man in a Stockholm
>restaurant who had just been told by his Japanese guests that they would
>like to drink beer with their meal.
>
>'In Sweden we have beer with different classes. You can have a 'lätt öl'
>which is a light, easy beer with no alcohol. You can even drink it at lunch
>time. Then you can have a 'people's beer', a folköl, and if you want you can

>buy that in shops. We also have in Sweden a mellanöl which is a
>'middle-class beer'. Yes and then you have another one, a class 3 one
too.

>This is a big, strong one but you have to go to the system company
to get

>it. But not on Sundays.' I think they then asked for mineral water.

>



>**Snaps**

>

>If you want to get the Swedes singing then open a bottle of ice-cold
snaps -

>which is the Swedish word for schnapps. Swedes drink snaps,
flavoured with

>caraway, aniseed, coriander, fennel and wormwood, with herring (of
course)

>and crayfish.

>

>You'll please them no end if you, too, were to join in the singing of a

>'snapsvisa' (a song which accompanies schnapps).

>

>Here is an English transcription of one of the most famous songs.

Grab a

>Swede and sing along. Skål!

>

>Hell and gore

>

>Chung hop father Allan Allan lay

>

>Hell and gore

>

>Chung hop father Allan lay

>

>Oh handsome inter hell an tar

>

>Hand hell air inter half an four

>

>Hell and gore!

>

>(Now knock it back in one)

>

>Chung hop father Allan lay

>



>

>

ps

Jan and I lived in a "attic" or garret

- **we saw this Church out our window lit up vet night**
- **magic**
- **Storykirken in Gamla Stan**

>Swedish food

>

>This is delicious. Swedes love anything that is pickled in spice and
>vinegar. You pickle it, they'll eat it. Other tasty delicacies include
fried

>salted herring, marinated herring and more pickled herring. Certain
dishes

>are associated with particular holidays and times of the year. At
Christmas,

>the Swedes eat a Christmas ham which is all very nice. They also eat
dried

>stock fish. Believe it or not this is dried fish soaked in lye. (Are your
>mouths watering?). This is followed by cold rice pudding. Yes, you
read

>correctly.

>

>Swedes get very excited about the advent of new potatoes. There is
nothing

>like a new potato having just been pulled out of the rich fertile soil
of

>Scania, southern Sweden. The price per kilo in the first weeks is

>prohibitive but after a while normal Swedes, as they all are of
course, can

>afford what they've all been waiting for. Swedish new potatoes are
usually

>eaten with chives, sour cream and-yes, you've guessed it, pickled
herring.

>

>Once you have tasted pickled herring, salt herring and marinated
herring it

>is time to try fermented baltic herring. A specialty from the north,
the

>fish is nowadays tinned. The tins become spherical as the
fermentation

>continues. To the uninitiated the smell, once the tin has been
opened,

>reminds you of....

>

>No wonder there are so many MacDonald hamburger joints in
Sweden.

>
>No, seriously. Swedish cooking has opened itself up to all manner
>ofinternational influences which has led to a Swedish culinary
miracle.
>Stockholm restaurants can match anything that Parisians can offer.
'Smaklig
>måltid!' which in English means Bon appétit!
>
>The normal Swede
>
>Every Swede should aspire to being normal and average. There's no
greater
>compliment than to be called an ordinary kind of person. 'To be as
people
>usually are' is a fine way to describe yourself and you'll instantly
earn
>others' respect. Successful people are just normal people who have
had a
>spot of luck - but it won't last. Every Swede can tell you about
>'Jantelagen' the law of Jante. This states that you shouldn't think you
are
>somebody. Somebody who is somebody pretends to be nobody
because anybody can
>be nobody and nobody would really want to be seen as somebody in
the eyes of
>anybody. Get it?
>
>The honest Swede
>
>Swedes are basically honest. They don't like cheating. That's a
foreign
>habit. There are only two occasions when it's acceptable to cheat.
>Joy-riding on the Stockholm underground which is regarded as a
kind of
>sport, and filling in your income-tax forms which is regarded a
necessity.
>
>The silent Swede
>
>Silence is not necessarily negative. Swedes are marvelously
reflective and
>introvert. To sit and say nothing for an hour is good for the soul.
Indeed,
>which other nation would sing about the virtues of silence in their
national

>anthem? 'Du gamla, du fria, du fjällhöga nord. Du tysta, du
glädjrika
>sköna'. (Ye ancient, ye land of the free, the high fells of the north. Ye
>silent, ye glorious beauty).
>
>The Grateful Swede
>
>The Swedes are a very thankful people. They may not have a word
for 'please'
>but they more than compensate by using the word 'tack' (thank you)
in any
>number of situations. They say 'tack' or 'tack tack'. The reply is
'tack' or
>even 'tack tack'. They say 'tusen tack' if they are particularly
grateful
>which is a thousand thank yous, and which in English is multiplied
by
>another thousand to become 'thanks a million'. They say 'tack för
maten'
>after a meal, which means thank you for the food and they say 'tack
för
>senast' meaning thank you your hospitality the last time we met.
They say
>'ja tack' for 'yes please' and 'tack själv' for thank you.
>
>The 'lagom bra' Swede or the Swede who is not too good but, then
again, not
>so bad either.



>

>The Complete Oxford Dictionary may boast over 650 000 entries to prove that

>English is a very wordy language. Swedish, on the other hand, has a smaller

>vocabulary, but they compensate by having words for which there is no

>English equivalent. Swedes are fond of neither extravagance in any form nor

>excesses (except in liquid form). Which is why they have a word like >'lagom', meaning 'just enough' and 'with moderation'. Everything can, and

>indeed should be, 'lagom'. What is

>absolutely-fanastic-marvellous-way-out-super-terrific to an American is

>'lagom bra' to a Swede ('Just about right and nothing to make a fuss >about'). 'Bra' here means 'good' and has nothing to do with lingerie in

>medium size. Doing things in moderation means always taking the middle path.

>If there is a choice between 'ja' and 'nej' the Swedes say 'Nja'. If there

>is heartless capitalism on one hand and mindless socialism on the other, the
>Swedes develop a 'lagom' sort of compromise called the Swedish Muddle or is
>it Model?
>
>The safety-conscious Swede
>
>Swedes need to feel safe and secure in everything they do. They wear knee
>pads, cycle helmets, ear plugs, protective glasses and life-jackets -
and
>that's when they do the washing up.
>
>Patriotism
>
>Swedes hang Swedish flags on their Christmas trees. Swedes even wipe their
>mouths on the Swedish flag as you'll even find Swedish flags on serviettes
>on special occasions. The Swedish flag appears on birthday cards, Christmas
>cards and playing cards. The Swedish national day is called the day of the
>Swedish flag when you may even find a Swedish flag at the top of a flag-pole.
>In fact the flag is run up on the slightest excuse. They hoist the flag if
>there's a birthday in your family, or indeed in anybody's family. They hoist
>it when they are expecting guests, they hoist it on Sundays and public
>holidays, and on the king's birthday.
>
>They'll hoist it simply because everybody else has hoisted theirs.
>
>Immigrants
>
>Sweden probably has the highest rate of academics in the cleaning business
>and in hotel kitchens. They are all called Hassan and Bogdan. Those looking
>for jobs they are more than well qualified for often change their names to
>more Swedish sounding names. Hassan becomes Hasse and Bogdan becomes Bengt.

>This might at least fool the prospective employer on the application form
>and they may be called to interview. Of a population of just under 9
>million, there are 1 million immigrants. Sales of peroxide are unusually
>high in Sweden.
>
>Nature
>
>The relationship Swedes have with Nature is particularly difficult to
>explain to a foreigner. Swedes are incredibly knowledgeable about plants,
>flowers, animals and creepy-crawlies. They not only know the name of the
>bird, but they can tell you how it sounds in the morning, where it nests and
>from whence it has migrated. Such is their worship of nature, that it is
>reflected in their family names. Wouldn't you like to be called 'Aspengrove'
>(Asplund), 'Lillyleaf' (Liljeblad), 'Flowertwig' (Blomqvist) and 'Mountain
>stream' (Beergström)?
>
>Religion
>
>Swedes gave up being Catholics years ago and adopted Lutheranism. However,
>always keen on having any excuse not to work, they kept the Catholic holy
>days and made them holidays; Twelfth Night, All Saints Day, Ascension Day.
>Twelfth night is logically called 'The eve of the thirteenth day' in
>Swedish. All Saints Day is nowadays translated as 'Halloween' with a Swedish
>accent, and Ascension Day was once translated by a Swede as 'The day Jesus
>took a flight to heaven'.
>
>Crime and punishment
>
>Major criminals like those omitting to file their income tax returns or
>forgetting to pay their bills on time are dealt with severely. Minor
>criminals like murderers and those convicted of grievous bodily harm are
>told not to do it again.

>
>Swedish Television
>
>God may be watching you. But I doubt whether he watches Swedish television.
>At prime viewing time Swedish television tells you that everything is
>dangerous to your health. Don't eat this Don't drink that, don't do that
>either. However, the death rate in Sweden is still 100%.
>
>Most of the money from the television license goes towards staging the
>Eurovision Song Contest which Sweden insist on winning every third year.
>
>Sport
>
>Swedes excel at sports. There is a nation-wide interest in sports, exercise
>and outdoor recreation. There are over 22 000 officially registered sports
>clubs, not taking into account the thousands of local clubs, including those
>at workplaces. Swedes are justly proud of their famous sportsmen and women -
>Björn Borg, Ingemar Stenmark, Ingemar Johansson, Annika Sörenstam to name
>but a few.
>
>Their ice-hockey players are so good that most of them have been sold and
>exported to major teams in the NHL. Swedes are frequently world champions in
>bandy. Then again, it's relatively easy to be world champions in a game
>nobody else has ever heard of.
>
>Swedish sex and sin
>
>There isn't any.
>
>Vacation
>
>Swedes take the whole summer off work. They have five weeks paid leave which

>they usually take in July. Once a Swede was told he had only five weeks to
>live. 'I hope it's in July' he said.
>
>Public holidays
>
>Yes, Sweden has its fair share. But they are not enough. 'Swedes are world
>best' (one of their favorite phrases) at finding excuses for not being at
>work. They created the 'squeeze day', explained once by a Swede as 'a day
>squeezed in between a holiday and a weekend. We have worked for it, so it's
>not a free day really'. Translated this means that if there is a public
>holiday on, say, the Thursday then they don't think it's worth going into
>work just for one day before they're off again at the weekend. The Friday,
>in this case, is a squeeze day. They accumulate time by working four minutes
>extra every day so they reckon it's not a holiday but time off in lieu of
>the overtime. Get it?
>
>If they are lucky, the Swedes can enjoy what can only be described as a
>'squeeze week' during the first week of May. There's the weekend, then a
>squeeze Monday as Tuesday is the 1st of May and a public holiday. Hopefully
>Ascension Day falls on the Thursday so it's no good going to work on the
>Wednesday and the Friday is squeezed between Thursday and Saturday and
>before you know it it's already the following weekend.
>
>Some Swedish traditional holidays
>
>1.Valborgsmässoafton (Walpurgis night)
>
>This is the evening before the 1st of May public holiday. A metamorphosis
>occurs. Like a butterfly emerging from months of lonely darkness in its

>cocoon, Swedes wriggle out into the open, stretch and flap their wings. The
>winter is officially over, at least according to the calendar, by gathering
>outdoors and lighting huge bonfires. From now on, Swedes shed their thick,
>cozy winter attire and put on flimsy, brightly-colored, cotton summer wear.
>If the Jews are God's chosen people, then on this night the Swedes are God's
>frozen people. Wind, rain, hail and snow abound, so quiteoften the bonfires
>don't have a long life-span. The Swedish calendar is not always in tune with
>reality.
>
>2. Midsummer
>
>This is celebrated on the weekend coming closest to the real midsummer day,
>24th of June. A mass exodus takes place just before with thousands of Swedes
>evacuating the towns and cities and heading for their weekend cottages in
>the country. They erect a maypole, erect being the operative word as in fact
>it is a pagan symbol offertility. It looks like a long thing with two round
>dangly bits!
>
>They dress it up in leaves and flowers (the maypole, that is) and then spend
>the afternoon dancing around it pretending to be small frogs. It's true.
>
>Swedes eat new potatoes and pickled herring (of course). Before long, it is
>not only the herring which is pickled as they do end to imbibe large
>quantities of beer and akvavit. No wonder they dance like frogs afterwards.
>Another important dish on the menu is fresh strawberries and cream. No
>foreign watery, tasteless EU-regulated strawberries, but large, curvy,
>juicy, sweet Swedish ones.
>

> Lucia, 13th of December

>

> Most people have no idea how the Lutheran Swedes came to celebrate the

> Sicilian Saint Lucia when even the Sicilians Don't pay her any attention

> whatsoever. In Swedish homes, hospitals, old-people's homes, factories and

> offices and up the High street, Lucia comes to spread light in the deep

> winter darkness - usually long before dawn, which at this time of year is

> just before it gets dark again. Little blonde girls, teenage blond girls and

> not-so-young-any-more blonde Maj-Britt who works in the accounting

> department, dress up in a full length, white gown with a red ribbon around

> their waist and become this year's Lucia. Lucia wears a wreath of

> lingonberry sprigs on her head and positioned in the wreath are several lit

> candles. As only one can be Lucia in each procession, the other less

> fortunate dark-haired girls have to walk behind her acting as some kind of

> bridesmaid. As Sweden is an extremely egalitarian society, boys (or Per from

> the purchasing department) are invited to take part in the procession as

> 'star boys'. Lucia's henchmen, sort of.

>

> This festival is typically and uniquely Swedish and the song, surprisingly

> entitled 'Sankta Lucia', sung by Lucia and her back up group, brings tears

> to everyone's eyes. As indeed it should.

>

> The Right of Common Access

>

> Swedes can be proud of many things. ABBA, tennis players and a variety of

> pickled herring. One thing that every Swede cherishes very dearly is the

> right to roam wherever he wishes on open land and to pick flowers, berries

> and mushrooms in forests and fields and to go swimming and boating in lakes

>and the sea. You are not allowed to pitch your tent in someone's back garden
>and you are not allowed to pick flowers from someone's flower beds. Likewise
>you are not allowed to climb over any fence enclosing a private home and you
>are certainly not allowed to take growing trees, bushes, bark, leaves,
>acorns or nuts. However, the right of common access does allow you to swat
>as many swarms of mosquitoes as is humanly possible - for the common good.
>
>Swedish small talk
>
>Swedes call this 'cold talk' or 'dead talk' which more or less sums up their
>opinion of it. Not being first in the queue when God dished out
>conversational talent, Swedes limit themselves to one major topic of
>conversation - the weather. Sweden is so large that it has all kinds of
>weather at once which is very convenient as there is always something to
>talk about.
>
>Swedish conversation
>
>When Swedes say something, they mean exactly what they say. No more, no
>less. There is usually no hidden meaning and they don't have to read between
>the lines. There are few fantastic metaphores in daily conversation, and
>exaggeration, a string of vivid adjectives and enhancing repetitions are
>often viewed with suspicion. Try retelling something that happened and
>embroider a little to make the story more stimulating. After a while the
>Swede will correct you as your version is beginning to stray from what
>really happened. 'And then there were loads of people who', 'There were five
>people' says Sven. 'And then after half an hour they came and', '20 minutes'
>says Sven 'They came after 20 minutes'. Elaborate story-telling has never

>been possible in Sweden

>

>Swedes are extremely good listeners. Sometimes it's difficult to tell

>whether they are thinking about what you said or if they have mentally gone

>to lunch - but they are listening to every word. The marvelous thing is they

>don't interrupt. Interrupting is a sign of bad manners. They patiently wait

>for their turn to express themselves concisely and precisely.

Sometime they

>have to wait for rather a long time. Especially when meeting with

>foreigners.

>

>Swedish women sometimes sound as if they have a breathing complaint. When

>they agree, they breathe in and say 'jahhhh'. Or they inhale and say

>'nejhhh'. They are not about to pass out in an asthma attack. They are just

>participating in the conversation.

>

>Swedes have a tendency to state the obvious. If you meet an acquaintance in

>a shop he'll probably say 'Oh, so you're out shopping'. Or, if you meet

>somebody you know out strolling in the countryside he'll say 'Oh, so you're

>out walking'. The temptation is to say 'No, I'm playing the piano' but

>don't. Sarcasm doesn't go down too well.

>

>Swedish discussion

>

>Being neutral and avoiders of conflict, the Swedes are careful not to

>express an opinion which may cause heated discussion. Ask a Swede what his

>opinion is he'll probably answer 'It depends'. He won't actually tell you

>what it depends on as that might lead to a debate and then you have to take

>sides. Hundreds of years of neutrality has taught him not to take sides -

>well at least not until he knows who's going to win.

>

>The Swedish language

>

>'Hej' - the word for hello and good-bye is the same. It's difficult to know
>whether people are coming or going.
>
>'Gift' - the word for married is the same word as for poison. This probably
>could explain the high divorce rate.
>
>'Sex' - the word for six is the same for sex, which gives a 'six-pack' a
>whole new meaning.
>
>'Oväder' - the word for stormy weather is, literally translated,
>'unweather'. And I would have thought it was very much weather.
>
>'Sambo' - you live and sleep together with your partner but are not married,
>well at least not to that particular partner.
>
>'Särbo' - you sleep with your partner and then go home to your own bed
>afterwards.
>
>'A-laget' - in Swedish, the 'A-team' is a group of hopeless alcoholics
>hanging outside the state liquor store. Not the kind you'd want in the
>national basketball team in other words.
>
>'Osvensk' - the word 'un-Swedish' mostly has a positive connotation!
A
>recent book review stated 'It's an exciting thriller, entertaining, has
>colorful characters, lots of action and imagination and very un-Swedish to
>name but a few positive qualities'.
>
>It's unbelievable, but true! Can you imagine a Frenchman using the word
>'un-French' as a positive quality?
>
>Swedish English (Swenglish)
>
>Although the Swedes generally have a very good command of the english
>language, sometimes they just don't get it right.
>
>'Please take off your clothes and follow me to the whip room.'
>

>(Translation: May I take your coat and accompany you to the VIP room)
>
>'She's away with the VD.'
>
>(Translation: She's away with the Managing Director) (VD =Managing Director)
>
>'His name is Öberg, a zero with two pricks.'
>
>(Translation: The letter 'o' with two dots = ö) (prickar = dots)
>
>'You'll have to show your leg before entering'
>
>(Translation: You'll have to show identification before entering.) (leg =
>id)
>
>'Please keep hanging on the line'
>
>(Translation: Please continue to hold the line)
>
>'Thank you for the last time'
>
>(Translation: Thank you for your hospitality.)
>
>'Can I follow you to the big mess in Stockholm?'
>
>(Translation: May I come with you to the large fair in Stockholm?) (mässa =
>fair)
>
>'He has many balls up in the air'
>
>(Translation: He is involved in many different projects.) (att ha bollar i
>luften = Swedish saying)
>
>A lesson in Swedish
>
>The Swede is a person of few words.
>
>Eng: Excuse me, I didn't quite catch what you were saying.
>
>Swe: Va? (vah?) Literal translation: What?
>

>Eng: Sorry for bumping into you like that. So terribly clumsy of me.
>
>Swe: Oj! (oi!) Literal translation: Oh!
>
>Eng: It's you! How lovely to see you!
>
>Swe: Nej, men! (nay men) Literal translation: No, but!
>
>Eng: How are things with you?
>
>Swe: Annars? (an ass) Literal translation: Otherwise?
>
>Eng: Excuse me, may I disturb you for a second?
>
>Swe: Du Literal translation: You
>
>Eng: Could I have a pint of your best bitter please.
>
>Swe: En stor stark Literal translation: A big strong one
>
> Eng: Shall we treat ourselves and indulge in a schnapps?
>
>Swe: En liten djävul? (en liten yayvull) Literal translation: A little
>devil?
>
>However sometimes English is just that bit more concise:
>
>Eng: Mind the gap!
>
>Swe: Tänk på avståndet mellan vagn och plattform när ni stiger av.
>
>Literal translation: Think of the gap between the carriage and the
plattform
>when you alight.
>
>-----Original Message-----